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ABSTRACT

A special summer program was developed to increase five elementary students' abilities to locate the main idea in written text. The researcher worked with the students 3 hours each morning for 8 weeks, devoting approximately 2 hours of that time to reading comprehension by teaching correct strategies for identifying the main idea. Question and answer sequencing along with repeated readings and making predictions were among the strategies implemented to improve main idea identification. Precision teaching was used to involve students in the learning process and to monitor improvement of daily scores. Results indicated increased levels of achievement for all members of the target group. (One table is included and 18 references are attached. Appendixes include: Story Framing, Logarithmic Chart, Daily Task Sheet, Pictures Can Reinforce Main Idea Identification, Identifying the Main Idea in Another Student's Short Story, Main Idea Sentence Strip, Semantic Mapping, and Academic Methods/Organizational and Management Techniques Pre/Posttest Scores.) (Author/MG)

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STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING MAIN IDEA IDENTIFICATION
IN EXPOSITORY TEXT WHILE IMPROVING READING
COMPREHENSION

by

JUDITH G. GUMP

A Practicum Report
submitted to the Faculty of the Center for the
Advancement of Education of Nova University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science.

The abstract of this report may be placed in a
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Abstract

Strategies for Improving Main Idea Identification in
Expository Text While Improving Reading Comprehension

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In a special summer program, the researcher worked with five students in order to increase the students' ability to locate the main idea in written text. Question and answer sequencing along with repeated readings and making predictions were among the strategies implemented to improve main idea identification. Precision teaching was used to involve students in the learning process and to monitor improvement of daily scores. The results indicated increased levels of achievement for all members of the target group. Appendices include story framing, semantic mapping, sample assignments, and the results of the researcher's pre and posttests.

Authorship Statement

I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. Where it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give this testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other workers in the field and in the hope that my own work, presented here, will earn similar respect.

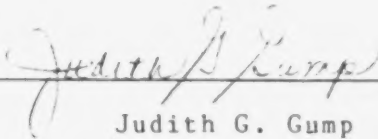

Judith G. Gump

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CHAPTER I

Purpose

This practicum was conducted in a small private clinic attached to the campus of a private university in the suburbs of a large metropolitan area. Fifty-two students, with deficiencies in one or more academic areas, were enrolled in a seven-week summer program. Instruction took place from 9:00-12:00 in a room with two other teachers and 13 students. This researcher was responsible for five students, four of whom had specific learning disabilities. The staff consisted of one director, two advisors, two administrative interns, three computer lab technicians, 11 teachers, and two office secretaries.

The Multi-Level Academic Skills Inventory (MASI), a standardized criterion-referenced test, was administered by the researcher to assess the academic strengths and weaknesses of five students. Of these five students, two will enter fourth grade and two will enter fifth grade in the fall. The fifth student will be re-evaluated following this program in order to determine if third grade should be repeated.

Throughout this summer program, the students worked on five identified areas of academic weakness determined by MASI testing. From these five areas, the researcher looked for a common problem among the students to focus on for this practicum. That common problem was poor reading comprehension, specifically detecting main idea. The information listed in Table 1 illustrates the results of the testing. Provided in the following paragraphs is a brief description of the target population used in this study.

Table 1
Results of MASI Test
Skill: Identifying Main Idea

Student	Book Level	Corrects Per/Min.	Errors Per/Min.	Discrepancy
Jonathan	B	.3	1.0	3.7
Chaya	C	.66	1.0	3.3
Anat	C	.33	1.3	3.6
Stacey	D	.66	1.0	3.3
Greg	D	.33	1.3	3.6
Mastery Criteria: 4-5 correct responses/minute sample performance with 0 errors				

Jonathan is a nine year old and will begin fourth grade in a private school this fall. Ritalin is taken

daily to control hyperactivity. Recent results from the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills indicated that Jonathan is reading two grade levels below level expectancy. Word analysis grade equivalency is three years below grade level. The MASI also confirmed that Jonathan had difficulty with comprehension and decoding words on a second grade level. In testing reading comprehension of main idea, Jonathan missed three out of four answers when asked to read four brief paragraphs and circle the main idea from three given choices. After brainstorming a specific topic, Jonathan was asked to write a brief story then circle the main idea and was unable to do so. Instead, Jonathan circled random words within the story.

Chaya is 10 years old and will begin fourth grade in a private school this fall. Chaya also demonstrated weaknesses in reading comprehension and locating the main idea. When asked to read five brief paragraphs then circle the main idea from three choices, Chaya missed three out of five items. Chaya was hesitant in replying to the brainstorming activity and when asked to write a short story, Chaya wrote only descriptive

words and nouns and did not make an attempt to circle the main idea.

Anat is nine years old and will be re-evaluated following this summer program to determine if third grade should be repeated. The Stanford Achievement Test indicated that Anat's reading comprehension and word study skills are a year and a half below expectancy level. MASI testing revealed that Anat was having difficulty decoding words. In testing for main idea, Anat missed four out of five items which required reading five brief paragraphs after which the main idea was selected from three choices. Following a brainstorming activity, Anat wrote a short story and circled some key words, but the choices did not provide evidence to indicate that the main idea of the story was understood.

Stacey is 10 years old and will enter fifth grade at a public school in the fall. Stacey was diagnosed as having an Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). School records indicated that Stacey's performance was weak in reading comprehension. In testing for main idea, Stacey missed three out of five items which required reading five brief paragraphs after which the main idea

was selected from three choices. Following a brainstorming activity, Stacey was able to write a brief story and correctly underline the main idea.

Greg is 10 years old and will enter fifth grade at a public school in the fall. Greg has also been diagnosed as having ADD. The MASI revealed that Greg has difficulty with decoding skills and reading comprehension. When asked to read five brief paragraphs and circle the main idea from three choices, Greg missed four out of five items. Following a brainstorming activity, Greg wrote a short story but was unable to indicate the main idea.

Final analysis of pretests given indicated that all five students had deficiencies in reading comprehension and four of the five students were unable to correctly identify the main idea in the short stories written.

The researcher teaches English and reading to fourth grade students in a private school and has 12 years of teaching experience to contribute to this project.

This practicum was implemented over an eight-week period with the following outcome objectives:

After seven weeks of implementation, three third grade students and two fourth grade students would (a) read 10 passages on appropriate grade level and circle the main idea from a choice of three at a rate of 8-10 correct responses in a two-minute timed sample; and (b) brainstorm and utilize webbing to write a short story containing a main idea in a five-minute timing and circle the main idea in the story.

After participating in three months of inservice training, the knowledge of teaching strategies and monitoring techniques of the researcher will increase by 50 percentage points as measured by pre/posttests.

CHAPTER II

Research and Solution Strategy

The following literature was reviewed with the intent to accumulate novel teaching strategies that would assist students in detecting the main idea in expository text while improving reading comprehension.

Research shows that the ability to comprehend textual information is a critical skill for academic success. Learning from text requires that students extract the main idea from what has been read. Yet, many students lack proficiency in recognizing the main idea or theme of passages. This deficiency limits comprehension and the ability to recall information presented in text and, in turn, hinders students' learning. When students are taught how to manipulate information and self-monitor the use of comprehension skills, reading comprehension improves (Stevens, 1988).

Incorporating strategy training with remedial reading instruction is one strategy implemented by teachers to strengthen reading comprehension and aid in locating the main idea. This method implicitly conveys that the student is capable of successfully applying

a strategy which can engender a sense of control over learning (Bandura, 1982; Schunk, 1985). In order to remediate poor readers' main idea comprehension deficit, it is necessary to have the student become more aware of the cognitive processes used to comprehend and organize ideas presented in text and how to control these processes. Two alternatives for instruction to improve poor readers' ability to comprehend the main idea of a paragraph are instruction on cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The cognitive strategy focuses on a student's perception of factual knowledge and the metacognitive strategy is based on the student's ability to utilize and demonstrate advanced comprehension in written text. Schunk (1985) suggested a three-phase ideal training strategy that is particularly effective for strategic instruction: instruction in comprehension fostering strategies, instruction on the importance and usefulness of the strategy and metacognitive monitoring strategies used to check the appropriateness of the strategy used. For the students involved in Schunk's study, these strategies were modeled by means of a computer tutorial program in which a portion of a

paragraph and a description of the main idea of the paragraph was presented. Students selected the main idea from a list of choices and received immediate feedback. If students were unable to determine the main idea from the information provided, more of the paragraph could be revealed. As more of the paragraph was presented, the added information helped to narrow the range of plausible choices until the entire paragraph had been presented and only one choice of the main idea was appropriate. During this instruction, the students were taught that potential main idea choices could be confirmed or refuted on the basis of information provided in the text and on students' prior knowledge.

Following this tutorial program, the students practiced determining whether portions of a paragraph provided sufficient information in order to select an appropriate main idea. From the process of providing more information about the paragraph, students learned that additional information made identifying the main idea easier. Students also learned to check earlier choices against the additional information given. This self-checking strategy provided students with a way to

evaluate knowledge about the paragraph and the appropriateness of the use of comprehension-fostering strategies for identifying the main idea.

The results of Schunk's (1985) study indicated that students who were given comprehension strategy training on finding main ideas, demonstrated comprehensive-conditional knowledge about when and why a strategy might be useful. Research confirms that training students to utilize specific strategies can lead to better comprehension performance (Schunk and Rice, 1987).

Comprehension monitoring cards are a useful strategy that increases literal recall and improves reading comprehension. Using a reading plan sheet, students are to answer these five questions: "What is reading? What is my goal? How difficult is the text? How can I accomplish my goal? How can I check on whether or not I can accomplish my goal?" (Babbs, 1983:201). In answering these questions, students are required to periodically evaluate memory and comprehension of the text and take remedial action when a problem occurs. To do this, students practice using individual sets of nine comprehension monitoring cards.

The cards which prompt this monitoring procedure read as follows:

1. Clink - "I understand."
2. Clunk - "I don't understand."
3. Read on.
4. Reread the sentence.
5. Go back and reread the paragraph.
6. Use a glossary.
7. Ask someone.
8. What did it say?
9. What do I remember?

The cards numbered 3-7 are strategy cards used for resolving comprehension problems; and the remaining cards are prompt cards. In using the cards, each student silently reads the first sentence of the text. The student pauses briefly to determine whether or not the sentence was understood. If the student comprehends the sentence, the clink card is raised, and the student continues to read the next sentence and follows the same procedure as before. If the clunk card is used, the student resolves the problem by using one or more of the five strategy cards. The student first needs to identify the problem, whether it is not understanding the meaning of a particular word or if it is the entire sentence in general. The student then uses one of the five strategy cards in order to get rid

of the clunk card. After each paragraph, the student raises card number 9 which reads, "What do I remember?" If the student is unable to respond, the paragraph is reread again until the paragraph is understood. The student continues on to the next paragraph following the same procedure until all of the material is read and fully comprehended. When implementing reading as a strategic process, students can learn to control learning processes. Students, using a set of comprehension monitoring cards for reading in content area textbooks, showed significantly better recall than students not using the cards (Babbs, 1983).

Models of text structure and text processing have contributed a great deal to the concept of main idea recognition. Joanna Williams (1988) has indicated that the ability to comprehend the main idea of certain simple expository texts rests strongly on basic categorization and cognitive classification skills. Classification activities are prevalent in classroom instruction in reading and most basal reading curricula use classification or categorization activities for vocabulary or comprehension instruction (Armbruster, Stevens, and Rosenshine, 1987).

Semantic mapping, a classification exercise is a visual, instructional method which capitalizes on the reader's prior knowledge. Through brainstorming (interactive discussion) this technique illustrates how words relate to one another by classifying words or concepts beneath an appropriate superordinate category. An understanding of the relations among concepts may directly transfer to comprehension of the relations among propositions in a paragraph. This understanding may stimulate students' background knowledge, which is used to achieve comprehension in more subtle ways. Classification activities may, in fact, improve the students' ability to identify the main idea of a specific passage because students gain more background knowledge about the content used in comprehending a paragraph (Stahl and Vancil, 1986).

Targeting is another technique used to differentiate general and specific ideas or main ideas and supporting details. After reviewing a picture and answering three questions pertaining to the picture, students organize ideas by using a Venn diagram. The picture is of three boys trying to peer over a fence in order to watch a baseball game. The topic of the

picture is determined by answering these three questions correctly: Who or what is in the picture? What is happening in the picture? Where is this happening? The topic is written in the center of the diagram where the word "topic" is indicated. After determining and labeling the topic, students can indicate the main idea followed by supporting details in extra spaces provided.

The Herringbone Technique is another graphic organizer that visually identifies, in a modified outline form, the main idea and the related supporting ideas of a lesson. Graphic representations are visual illustrations of verbal statements. Frame categories, such as those mentioned above, are fundamental to understanding a given topic. Graphics show, at a glance, the key parts of a whole concept enabling the learner to better comprehend text (Cunningham, 1988).

Pre-reading questioning has proven quite successful, when used with stories, in promoting both comprehension of the literal meanings stated by a text as well as comprehension of ideas only implied by a text. The remarkable result of this technique is that students not only exhibit better comprehension of the

key ideas discussed and predicted; students also exhibit better comprehension of other, sometimes unrelated, text elements and implied ideas. Pre-reading questioning seems to elicit deeper processing of the text as a whole (Pearson, 1983).

Williams (1988) also favors pre-reading questioning strategies. Williams' research revealed that a large majority of low-level learners and learning disabled children could not even provide the general topic of the paragraph when presented with specific questioning. Williams' (1988) study began by introducing simple paragraphs that contained a topic sentence, which reflected the specific topic of discourse. Several detail sentences followed; each independently supported the topic sentence. Simple, pertinent questions, relating to the main idea, were presented to the students. Response demands were carefully sequenced until the students could identify, then circle, the main idea in the paragraph. During the second portion of the study, Williams (1988) introduced paragraphs containing anomalous sentences because, "research has demonstrated that negative instances are valuable for concept attainment." The

sequence of questioning remained the same, but additional questions, leading to detection of the anomalous sentence, were asked. Results indicated that performance on recognizing and formulating main idea statements can be improved by thorough, systematic questioning prior to and following reading expository text (Williams, 1988).

Many aspects of a text can serve as cues to what is important. The types of cues or "relevance signals" affect the signaling of important information and the identification of the main idea (Kintsch and VanDijk, 1985). These cues or signals include: graphic signals which are type size italics and underlining; syntactical signals which is word order or categorization of words that are related; lexical signals such as words and phrases like important, relevant, or the subject is; semantic signals which is thematic words and sentences, summarizing or introductory sentences, repetition of words and sentences; and schematic signals like story grammars where parts of a paragraph are omitted and students write appropriate responses on the blank line making the paragraph complete.

Such generative tasks and instructional techniques are particularly helpful in getting poor achievers to focus on important information in the text, because poor readers are less sensitive to the important information in text than good readers (Bridge, 1984). Generating summary sentences is especially useful for poor readers who do not spontaneously use comprehension strategies. Comprehension-monitoring activities, such as predicting, clarifying, summarizing, and questioning were also found to be useful strategies for poor readers (Polincsar and Brown, 1983). In addition, familiarization with different types of text organization seemed to be helpful in promoting reading comprehension (Englert and Hiebert, 1984; Taylor and Beach, 1984).

Teacher-directed instruction is yet another strategy used in reinforcing main idea comprehension. Direct teaching consists mainly of the instructor talking to the students, explaining the concept of main idea by "thinking aloud," so students can imitate the thinking process. Built into the direct instruction was heavy emphasis on application and practice in new concepts, along with generating student responses and

composing main idea statements. Results confirmed that teacher-directed training improved reading comprehension skills by heightening student awareness of top-level information in texts. There was also some indication that teacher-directed training made students more attentive and that this greater attention led to improved reading comprehension (Rinehart, Stahl, and Erickson, 1986).

The Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) is identified as an exemplary instructional activity for developing comprehension. DRTA differs greatly from basal question-and-answer patterns which were established by Bett's Directed Reading Activity (DRA) in 1946. The DRTA students combined prior knowledge with information from the text to predict what will happen in the story. Pre-reading discussion encourages students to ask questions which will provide answers parallel to students' predictions. While students continue reading, the purpose is to confirm any predictions made in class or to see what new information will cause any predictions to be revised. Students use prior knowledge and concrete evidence from the text to arrive at new insights and understandings.

Developing comprehension is an integral part of all phases of the DRTA. Comprehension occurs as students combine prior knowledge and new information to make predictions, then draw conclusions and speculate during class discussions (Haggard, 1988).

Story frames enhance students' ability to monitor reading comprehension while reading (Appendix A:43). Introductions to story frames should take place directly after reading a given selection. Five types of story frames are suggested for various kinds of stories. Figure 2 from Appendix A focuses on important ideas or plot. The entire class is encouraged to contribute responses for the blank spaces making the story frame a complete paragraph. When students become adept at using the type of story frame, students can be given the story frame in advance of reading the story, and use it independently to help students monitor comprehension while reading (Fowler, 1982).

Precision teaching is a procedure used to measure student learning and proficiency of skills based on prescribed objectives while maintaining academic accountability. Student performance is monitored daily by taking timed tests of each student's objectives and

recording the scores on logarithmic charts (Appendix B:45). Taking daily timed tests provide the student and the teacher with immediate feedback on student progress. Based on daily recorded scores, a precision teacher can make decisions on whether a student should step back to a prerequisite skill or slice back to an easier objective or advance to a more difficult one. Precision teaching programs a student for success, since academic adjustments can be made immediately rather than allowing a student to become frustrated by remaining on an objective which is too easy or too difficult. Precision teaching also enables teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional procedures. A most beneficial aspect of precision teaching is student involvement in the learning process. Recording daily scores enables the student to visualize progress. Charting data keeps students motivated and excited about learning (West, Young, and Spooner, 1990).

The strategies chosen from implementation were classification and categorization activities, graphic organizers, teacher directed question-and-answering techniques, Directed Reading Thinking Activity,

relevance signals and thematic cues, and precision teaching because these methods could be implemented within a brief period of time and were conducive to the immediate needs of the target population involved in this practicum. Strategy value information and comprehension monitoring cards were strategies which were discarded during implementation due to the quantity of time needed to effectively implement these methods.

Chapter III describes the solutions used during the implementation of this practicum.

CHAPTER III

Method

The purpose of this chapter is to describe how the strategies discussed in Chapter II were implemented with a selective target population and to acknowledge interaction with people as an essential process for effective practicum implementation.

In order to prepare for this practicum, three preservice training sessions were held. During these sessions, the Multi-Level Academic Skills Inventory (MASI), focusing on math, reading, and language arts, was demonstrated and precision teaching was explained by the director of the program. Participants were encouraged to sign out each MASI until the following meeting in order to become familiarized with the contents. Throughout the training sessions, participants were taught how to use precision teaching and instructoral methods were presented by the director and advisors at weekly inservice meetings.

Parent-teacher conferences were held during the third week and again at the conclusion of the program. Individual programs designed for each child were

described to parents. Parents were shown logarithmic charts to illustrate progress made. Parental input was encouraged regarding the child's strengths and weaknesses.

This researcher worked with five students three hours each morning for eight weeks, devoting approximately two hours of that time to reading comprehension by correctly teaching strategies for identifying the main idea. During the first week of implementation, precision teaching was introduced to the students along with logarithmic charts for self-recording daily progress.

Daily task sheets (Appendix C:47) provided the structure to help students demonstrate time management, improve organizational skills, and stay on task. The researcher prescribed 10 activities on each sheet, listing five specific skills, each preceded by an enabling activity. As the activity was completed, the student would "check off" that task from the list. Having three hours in which to complete the 10 activities, each student learned within the first two days of the program, through trial and error, to decide how much time was needed to complete every assignment.

Each student also exercised the ability to select which activity to do next without the instructor's assistance and remained independently on task due to peer and self-motivation in order to complete each daily task sheet within the allotted time period.

Teacher-directed lessons were also a useful technique that allowed the instructor to communicate valuable information to the students. Prior to reading, the term "main idea" was written on the board followed by a precise definition. While the teacher read a brief passage, the students read along silently. The students were instructed to carefully listen for the specific purpose of recognizing key words or phrases that the instructor verbally over-emphasized, as clues, in order to help students to identify the main idea. After reading the passage, the instructor restated only the key word or words related to "who" the main characters were after which students highlighted these key words in the passage. The instructor continued stating specific key words that identified "what" happened in the passage and "where" the action took place until all key words were highlighted. All passages read to students during

teacher-directed lessons contained key words that facilitated recognition of the main idea. Each highlighted key word was then written on a 5" by 8" index card and the instructor pointed out to the students that the key words on the cards helped in identifying the main idea, in other words, what the passage talked about. The teacher wrote the main idea on a sentence strip and, using colored yarn, had students individually connect a key word card to the main idea sentence strip. Finally, students were directed to re-read the main idea on the sentence strip, then locate and underline the same main idea in the passage.

Question-and-answer sequencing was another strategy used to locate the main idea. Given a short story, the teacher and each student took turns reading a paragraph until the story was read. The instructor then asked the students questions based on Bloom's Taxonomy to promote critical or higher-level thinking. Questions based on specific knowledge were asked first, such as "What is this paragraph about? Who is the main character? Where does the story take place?" Correct responses were obtained before further questioning was

continued. As a visual aid, the teacher drew a picture on construction paper, using colored markers, as a concrete method in supporting student responses. The picture, along with accurate responses, led to answering the most important question, "What is the main idea of the paragraph?" In another question-and-answer activity, students were given the same picture (Appendix D:49) and were asked to answer three questions: "Who or what is in the picture? What is happening in the picture? and Where is this happening?" The correct responses to those questions were to be combined into one sentence that stated the main idea of the picture. Using the basic knowledge provided in the picture, the instructor expanded on critical thinking skills based on analysis, synthesis, and evaluation questions, such as "Decide what items in the picture helped you to determine what the main idea was and tell why. Based on the picture, imagine what the three boys are feeling and thinking." These and other critical thinking questions along with basic knowledge and comprehension questioning were beneficial in guiding students to main idea identification. Through teacher-directed lessons and question-and-

answer sequencing, students were taught to independently think about vital "question starters," such as "who," "what," and "where" in order to independently locate the main idea in written text.

As the students demonstrated confidence with these activities, irrelevant, anomalous sentences were introduced into passages students were asked to read. The teacher continued with the basic sequence of questioning but asked additional questions pertinent to the detection of the unrelated information. Students drew lines through the anomalous sentence to indicate the irrelevance of that sentence in detecting the main idea and were asked to state why the anomalous sentence did not belong. As a final question-and-answer sequence technique, the students were given five identical passages to read and were asked to circle the main idea from three choices. Each student read a passage out loud and selected the main idea. The teacher then questioned the students as to why the other two choices could not have been the main idea and why the response chosen was the correct main idea of the story.

Story mapping was used to further reinforce main idea identification. The teacher had each student write a short story following a brainstorming activity that centered on a specific topic of discourse. Students took part in this activity three days a week and wrote during a five-minute timing. Following the five-minute timing, students were given an additional two minutes in order to proofread written work out loud and underline the main idea of the story. As the students progressed in locating the main idea in text passages and self-written, short stories, the children began to exchange writings with one another then underline the main idea in other students' stories (Appendix E:51). In locating the main idea, students were repeatedly reminded to think about three questions: Who are the main characters? What is happening? Where does the action take place? Students learn to independently identify the main idea in written text when conditioned to ask questions such as these while reading.

Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) was also used to help students identify the main idea while improving reading comprehension. Each student was

given a copy of a short story to read and a piece of construction paper to use as a cover sheet. Students used the construction paper to cover everything on the front page except the title of the story. The teacher would ask, "What do you think the story is about from only reading the title?" Students would read the title out loud and would submit ideas based on key words given in the title. All ideas were considered and discussed. The students then read the first two pages of the story silently and again students predicted what was happening in the story. This process continued until the story was read and students were then able to assess if predictions given were accurate. The teacher continued reinforcing the DRTA method of previewing and predicting by showing the students another picture on the cover of a book. This time the title was covered. Students wrote creative titles and predicted the outcome of the story based on the picture alone. While reading the story, the instructor would confirm students' predictions and stimulate additional suggestions until the story was concluded and the main idea was identified.

Sentence strips were yet another learning tool used to reinforce the DRTA method (Appendix F:53). Individual sentence strips were stapled together to form a riddle. Each strip provided a one sentence clue that would stimulate the reader to think about what the object or main idea might be. For example, the first clue read, "I am round." The student would brainstorm and predict what the object might be. The student then read the second strip, "I am very hard" and again brainstormed ideas. The teacher praised all suggestions and advised the student to read on if the main idea was not correctly identified. Clues became less vague and more descriptive so that the main idea could be determined. Following the final clue was a blank sheet of paper and following the blank strip was the answer or the main idea. On the blank sheet of paper, the student wrote an additional clue that supported the main idea.

Categorizing and classifying with graphic organizers was a useful technique used in determining what a child knows, while expanding the student's vocabulary.

From the ceiling, the teacher hung a large Mickey Mouse umbrella with several blue ribbons attached to the umbrella's interior wiring. Connected to the top of the umbrella were two large black ears. Between the ears was a sign that read "Main Idea" and a blank card was attached to the umbrella's handle. In a large bag were many Disney World souvenirs. Students selected souvenirs, one at a time, from the bag and hung that object from a ribbon. After each item was attached to a ribbon, the instructor asked, "How are all of these objects alike? Which objects are toys? What objects can be worn?" Students responded by categorizing objects into groups. Questioning was continued until the students determined the main idea, "gifts or souvenirs from Disney World." The main idea was then written on the blank card.

Semantic mapping was another activity that reinforced classification and categorization skills by using graphic organizers (Appendix G:55). Using a large sheet of construction paper, the teacher drew a picture or placed the actual object being discussed in the center of the sheet. As students brainstormed and submitted words associated with the object, the teacher

would categorize the terms. After the activity, students would suggest titles or topics best suited for each category. The students would then write short stories and were encouraged to incorporate words used during the brainstorming activity in the stories.

Story framing was used to help students monitor comprehension and in detecting the main idea. The story frame was introduced shortly after students read a story. Five types of story frames were illustrated in Appendix A:43. A simple story frame, such as the one in Figure 1, was introduced first. The teacher spent additional time on Figure 2 since it focused on recognizing important ideas or plot. The teacher accepted all reasonable answers as students worked together on each frame. After students became accustomed to each type of story frame, the frames would be given to students prior to reading a story as an advanced organizer and to aid in monitoring comprehension and main idea identification while reading.

The results of the instructional techniques and the results of the implementation of these strategies will be discussed in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Implementation of the strategies used to meet the academic needs and objectives of the target group were described in Chapter III. In this chapter, the results of the implementation will be discussed.

The first objective of this practicum was: Students will read 10 passages on appropriate grade level and circle the main idea from a choice of three at a rate of four to five correct responses in a one-minute timed sample.

The beginning scores of the target group were: Jonathan, one correct out of four items; Chaya, two correct out of five items; Anat, one correct out of five items; Stacey, two correct out of five items; Greg, one correct out of five items. The final scores of the target population were: Jonathan, four correct out of four items; Chaya, Stacey and Greg each had five correct out of five items; Anat, four correct out of five items. Results indicated that four out of five students met the set objective. Even though one

student was unable to meet the set objective, considerable progress was made.

The second objective of this practicum was: Students will brainstorm and utilize webbing to write a short story containing a main idea in a five-minute timing and circle the main idea in the story. Beginning performance indicates that out of five students, Stacey was the only student capable of circling the main idea in a short passage. After working on this skill repeatedly throughout the seven weeks of implementation, every member of the target population was able to consistently meet the objective.

The third objective of this practicum was: After participating in three months of inservice training, the knowledge of teaching strategies and monitoring techniques of the researcher will increase by 50 percentage points as measured by pre/posttests (Appendix H:57). The researcher's score on the pretest was 15 out of 100, and the posttest score was 87 out of 100. This indicates an improvement by 72 percentage points and the objective set was met and surpassed.

The researcher learned how to effectively utilize precision teaching in measuring and recording the

academic growth of students and in making daily decisions concerning student progress. Precision teaching was recognized by the researcher as a valuable tool for motivating students because it directly involved student interaction in the learning process. Several skills and strategies learned during the implementation of this practicum will be incorporated into the researcher's teaching strategies as a means to further enhance learning.

Recommendations were made for each student in the following chapter to ensure continued student progress in improving reading comprehension and locating the main idea.

CHAPTER V

Recommendations

In Chapter IV, methods used during practicum implementation were discussed. In this chapter, recommendations will be made to ensure continued student progress. During the final parent-teacher conference, recommendations were made regarding the future progress of each student. Since Jonathan attends the small private school where this practicum setting took place, the researcher recommended that materials used during implementation continue to be incorporated in Jonathan's reading curriculum. Suggestions were made for the parent and child to read aloud together on a daily basis.

Chaya requires a great deal of moral support and encouragement in order to perform effectively. The researcher recommended that Chaya visit the library on a regular basis, select books, and be provided with time for reading so that reading becomes a pleasurable experience. The parents were also encouraged to become role models and to frequently praise the child for good reading habits. To further comprehension, suggestions

were made that the parent and child read aloud together, with the parent asking questions intermittently throughout the story using positive reinforcement when correct responses were given and guiding the child to the correct response when necessary. The parent should also encourage the child to make predictions about the story before and while reading.

As previously mentioned in the first chapter, Anat was re-examined following the summer program in order to determine grade placement. After reviewing the results of the test, then speaking with Anat's third grade teacher and guidance counselor, placement for fourth grade was recommended and approved. Tutoring was suggested, along with small student-teacher reading groups. Various materials on comprehension were sent to the parents enabling further reinforcement of comprehension skills.

Since Stacey enjoys working on a computer, purchasing specific software was recommended. Reading short, exciting books for pleasure, in order to maintain the skills gained this summer, was also a suggestion. The parents were pleased with Stacey's

progress during the program and agreed to encourage reading at home and in school.

Greg performs most effectively in a small classroom setting and because he attends a large public school, recommendations were made to seek enrollment in the private school where the summer program took place. A list of computer software on comprehension was also given to the parent.

The researcher found this summer program to be a very enlightening experience and highly recommends that precision teaching be used by teachers whenever possible in the classroom as a means for measuring progress and maintaining student accountability. The researcher intends to practice this strategy in a fourth grade classroom in order to help motivate learning and to further involve students in the learning process. Precision teaching, together with other methods, such as teacher-directed question-and-answer sequencing incorporated with Directed Reading Thinking Activity can enhance learning, provide for academic success, and establish a solid foundation for well developed reading skills that will be beneficial for a lifetime.

The researcher has shared various strategies implemented throughout the summer program with administrators, a team co-worker, and the entire faculty during a cooperative learning workshop. The reading research instructor began utilizing materials, used by this researcher during the summer program, for the 1990-91 school year. This researcher has worked closely with the reading research teacher in assisting elementary school students work more productively in main idea identification while improving reading comprehension.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Story Framing

Appendix A

Story Framing

Figure 1
Story summary with one
character included

Our story is about _____
 _____ is an
 important character in our story. _____
 tried to _____
 The story ends when _____

Figure 2
Important Idea or plot

In this story the problems starts
 when _____. After that,

 Next, _____
 _____. Then, _____
 _____. The problem is
 finally solved when _____
 _____. The story ends _____

Figure 3
Setting

This story takes place _____
 _____. I know this because the
 author uses the words "_____"

_____. "Other clues that
 show when the story takes place are

Figure 4
Character analysis

_____ is an important character
 in our story. _____ is important because
 _____. Once, he/she
 _____. Another time,
 _____. I think that
 _____ is _____
 (character's name) (character trait)
 because _____

Figure 5
Character comparison

_____ and _____ are two
 characters in our story. _____
 (character's name)
 is _____ while

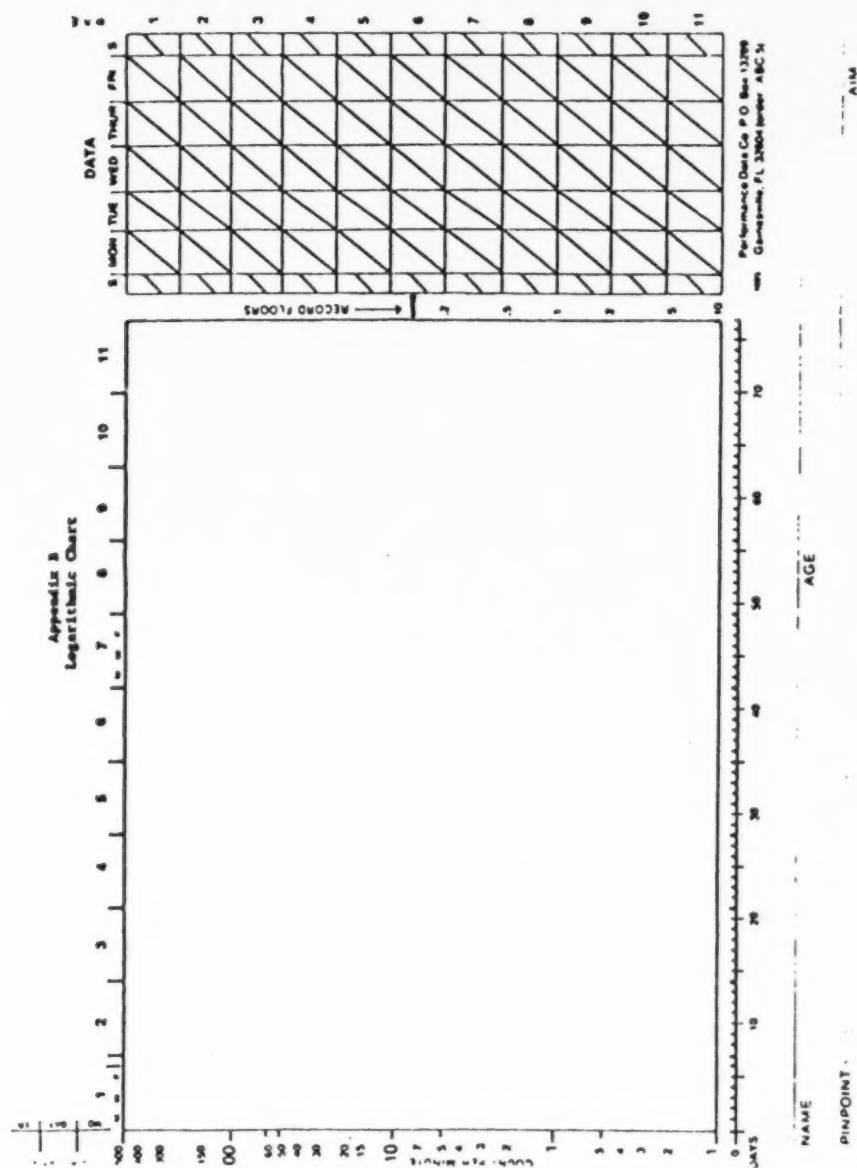
 (trait)
 _____ is _____
 (other character) (trait)
 For instance, _____ tries to _____.
 _____ learns a lesson when _____

(Fowler, 1982)

Appendix B
Logarithmic Chart

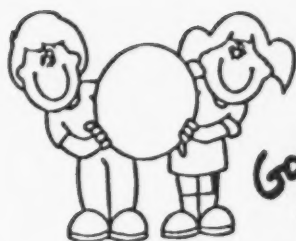
Appendix B

Logarithmic Chart



Appendix C
Daily Task Sheet

Appendix C
Daily Task Sheet



Good Morning! **THINGS TO DO TODAY**

Date 7/31/90 Name Jonathan Done

- 1 Systems 80 IE Record ☒
- 2 See-Write Multiplication M2C ☒
- 3 Verse Title pg 6 (Subtraction) ☒
- 4 See-Write Subtraction S2 ☒
- 5 Nim ☒
- 6 See-Say Grade 3 Unit 5 ☒
- 7 Main Idea ENVELOPE + DETAILS sheet ☒
- 8 See-Write Main Idea Book B Units: 7/8 ☒
- 9 Your favorite dessert Yum! Yum! ☒
- 10 See-Write Story ☒
- 11 Work on puzzle for spatial reinforcement ☒
- 12 Read a book with instructor ☒

Appendix D

Pictures Can Reinforce
Main Idea Identification

Appendix D

Pictures Can Reinforce
Main Idea Identification

Main Idea

DIRECTIONS: Look at the picture and answer the questions.

1. WHO or WHAT is in the picture?

2. WHAT IS HAPPENING in the picture?

3. WHERE is this happening?



4. Now, put all the information from these three sentences together and make ONE sentence that sums up the MAIN IDEA of the picture.

Appendix E

Identifying the Main Idea
In Another Student's Short Story

Appendix E

Identifying the Main Idea
In Another Student's Short Story

MY FAVORITE TOY

When I went to Mexico, I went into a Mexican gift shop. I bought a toy there called a Balero. When I learned how to use it, I loved it. It was red, yellow, green and blue and had a wooden ball attached to the end of a rope. The other end of the rope was tied to the end of a stick. You had to swing the ball around and catch the ball on the stick.

By: Stacey Steinbaum

Main Idea Identified and Located by Anat Yeffet.

Appendix F
Main Idea Sentence Strip

Appendix F
Main Idea Sentence Strip

First Sentence Strip Clue:

I am round.

Second Sentence Strip Clue:

I am very hard.

Third Sentence Strip Clue:

I can be brown or green.

Fourth Sentence Strip Clue:

I taste sweet.

Fifth Sentence Strip Clue:

I hold a liquid inside.

Sixth Sentence Strip Clue:

Monkeys try to crack me.

Seventh Sentence Strip Clue:

I could be found in candy bars.

Eighth Sentence Strip:

I am a COCONUT!

Ninth Sentence Strip:

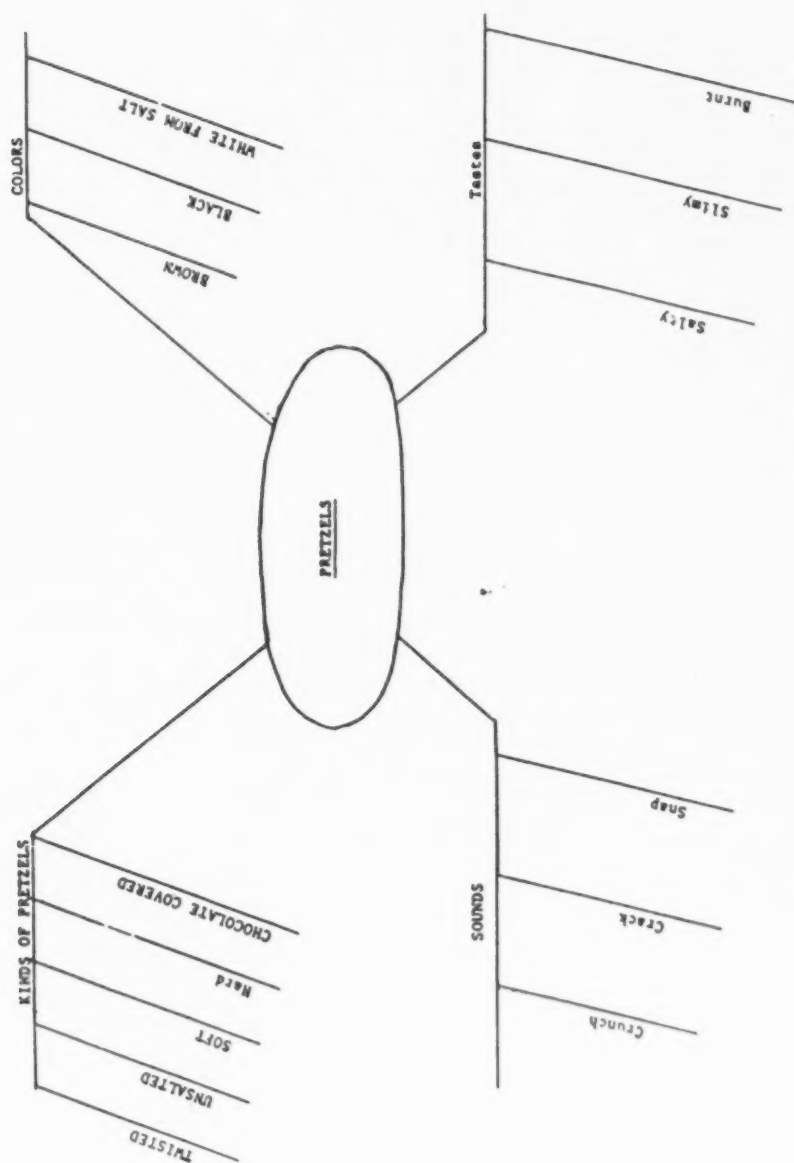
Is a blank strip of paper so that the student can add an additional clue to support the main idea.

Student's Clue:

It's hairy

Appendix G
Semantic Mapping

Appendix G
Semantic Mapping



Appendix H

Academic Methods/Organizational and
Management Techniques Pre/Posttest Scores

Appendix H

Academic Methods/Organizational and
Management Techniques Pre/Posttest Scores

Super Marks

JUDY GUMP

pre test score: 15

4.4 - 5.0 A

posttest score: 87

3.7 - 4.3 B

implementation grade: 44

3.0 - 3.6 C